



FERAL HOG FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Report feral hog sightings and damage to 573-522-4115 ext. 3296 or at

www.mdc.mo.gov/feralhog.

WHAT IS A FERAL HOG?

Feral hogs are not wildlife and are an invasive, non-native, destructive species. In Missouri, a feral hog is defined as any hog, including Russian and European wild boar, that is not conspicuously identified by ear tags or other identification and is roaming freely on public or private land without the land manager's or landowner's permission.

WHY ARE THEY A PROBLEM?

- **Feral hogs destroy habitat and young wildlife.** Their rooting and wallowing cause soil erosion, reduce water quality, and damage agricultural crops and hay fields, as well as destroy sensitive natural areas such as glades, fens and springs.
- **They forage heavily on acorns and compete directly with native species for food.** They commonly eat eggs of ground-nesting birds and almost anything they encounter, including reptiles, amphibians and small mammals. They have been known to kill and eat deer fawns.
- **They spread diseases to people, pets, and livestock.** Feral hogs are known to carry diseases such as swine brucellosis, pseudorabies, trichinosis and leptospirosis. These diseases commonly cause infertility, low milk production, and high mortality in newborn domestic animals. The domestic swine industry is currently free of these diseases, but they are endemic in feral hogs. The reintroduction of these diseases into domestic livestock populations could be devastating to the agriculture industry.
- **Feral hogs cause economic damage.** Found in at least 35 states, the USDA estimates that feral swine cause approximately \$1.5 billion in damages and control costs in the United States each year, with at least \$800 million of this estimate due to direct damage to agriculture.

WHERE DID FERAL HOGS COME FROM?

Hog hunting for recreation and paid hog hunts gained popularity in the 1990s. This resulted in some individuals illegally releasing feral hogs to establish populations for recreational hunting and selling guided hog hunts. These illegal releases are still occurring, which establishes feral hog populations in new areas and increases the population of hogs in frequently hunted areas. This is evident as the Missouri feral hog population grew from a few counties in the Southeast region to over 30 counties across the southern 1/3 of the state.

Because feral hogs are highly adaptable animals and prolific breeders, their numbers grow at an alarming rate. A sow can become pregnant at six months of age and can have two litters per year with an average of 6 piglets per litter. MDC has received feral hog damage complaints from private landowners since the late 1990s.

WHERE ARE FERAL HOGS IN MISSOURI?

Feral hog populations are established in over 30 counties in southern Missouri.

HOW DO I RECOGNIZE IF FERAL HOGS ARE ON MY PROPERTY?

There are a number of signs that indicate the presence of feral hogs. Hogs root around in pursuit of various foods like roots, acorns, and earthworms, plowing the soil to depths of 2 to 18 inches. If several hogs are involved, these rooted areas can stretch over many acres. If you see an area that looks like it has been tilled, chances are feral hogs were the cause. Other indications of hog damage include muddy pits, called wallows, or mud rubbings low on trees and telephone poles.

ARE FERAL HOGS DANGEROUS FOR HUMANS?

Feral hogs can be aggressive and have been known to attack humans. But the greater risk is that of contracting diseases and parasites from handling or processing infected hogs. Swine brucellosis and trichinosis have been documented in feral hogs in Missouri, and can affect humans and domestic animals.

Feral hogs have excellent senses of smell and hearing, and they typically avoid contact with humans. However, they have occasionally chased hunters and other outdoor enthusiasts. Be prepared to defend yourself against feral hogs if needed.

WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT THE FERAL HOG PROBLEM?

In 2015 the Missouri Department of Conservation created the Missouri Feral Hog Elimination Partnership with 12 government agencies, more than 30 agriculture and outdoor groups with the intent to trap and eliminate all the feral hogs on public and private lands. Staff from this partnership help hundreds of landowners across the state each year to trap and eliminate feral hogs.

It took several years for feral hogs to occupy all the areas that they do today, and it will take time to eliminate them. The cost to landowners, public lands, wildlife and wildlife habitat incurred by feral hogs is too great to do nothing. Feral hog populations are isolated and typically in remote, rugged terrain, making locating and killing them difficult. Trapping is the most effective means of eliminating feral hogs. Adding to the problem are illegal releases of hogs on public and private land. If you see someone releasing hogs, report them immediately to your local conservation agent or online at www.mdc.mo.gov/feralhog.

Concentrated trapping efforts by state and federal employees and private landowner partners have brought success in some areas, and to be effective, efforts need to continue year-round until every hog has been eliminated. Success will take time and cooperation from everyone is necessary; hunters not shooting at hogs, landowners trapping entire groups of hogs at a time and partner organizations providing knowledge and assistance to Missourians.

TRAPPING AND ELIMINATION NUMBERS

Thanks to the growing multi-agency and landowner partnerships, progress is made each year.

Year	Feral hogs removed.	Year	Feral hogs removed.
2019	10,495	2016	5,358
2018	9,365	2015	3,649
2017	6,567		

WHAT REGULATIONS ARE IN PLACE IN REGARD TO FERAL HOGS?

Releasing hogs is illegal. The take of feral hogs is prohibited on conservation areas and other lands owned, leased, or managed by MDC. It is also illegal to transport hogs without the proper paperwork and illegal to hold them in a pen without a permit, proper fencing and paperwork. Anyone who witnesses someone releasing feral hogs should report it to the local conservation agent or call the toll-free Operation Game Thief number, **1-800-392-1111**, which is manned 24 hours a day.

WHY DID MDC PROHIBIT HUNTING OF HOGS ON MDC LANDS?

Hunting is an effective tool for managing populations of wildlife. However, feral hogs are not wildlife and the Department should not manage them, the goal is to eliminate them. MDC asks that the public report feral hogs instead of shooting them. When hunters shoot feral hogs, it complicates efforts to remove these pests. Hogs are social animals that travel in groups called sounders. Shooting into a group of 15 hogs and killing one or two hogs does not reduce the population, it scatters the sounder in various directions and makes trapping efforts aimed at catching the entire group at once more difficult, because hogs become trap-shy and wary of baited sites. With their high reproductive rate, removing one or two hogs does not help to reduce populations. Feral hog hunting also creates incentive for illegal releases. Anyone who observes a feral hog or damage caused by feral hogs should report it to the Conservation Department rather than shooting the animal so we can work together towards elimination.

WHY DOESN'T MDC PUT A BOUNTY ON FERAL HOGS?

MDC does not support a bounty on feral hogs because bounties are ineffective in eliminating populations. Bounties have been used across the United States for decades on a variety of species, including rattlesnakes, groundhogs, foxes, beavers, bears, coyotes and others and have never been shown to eliminate a species. A bounty would also give financial incentives to those who illegally release feral hogs. People that release feral hogs seek to profit while the hogs destroy farms, state parks, wildlife habitat and more. MDC's goal is to eliminate feral hogs in Missouri, and a bounty will not help achieve this goal.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE MEAT OF FERAL HOGS AFTER TRAPPING?

The Department and state and federal partners do not maintain a list of individuals who would like to be notified when feral hogs are caught for several reasons. First, unlike most wildlife, these animals carry diseases (brucellosis, tuberculosis, trichinosis, hepatitis E, etc.) that can be transmitted to humans. For example, brucellosis can be transmitted through contact with an infected hog's blood, fluid, or tissue. One of the main priorities as these operations are conducted is to ensure the safety of staff and citizens; in order to accomplish this, handling of these animals is kept to a minimum. Distribution of feral hog carcasses, which could be carrying as many as 24 different diseases, according to the USDA, cannot be justified because of the risk to public health, risk to Department staff, and the logistics necessary to transport the carcasses from remote areas. Individuals may take or be given feral hog carcasses taken on private property year-round with landowner permission.

WHAT HAPPENS TO FERAL HOG CARCASSES AFTER TRAPPING?

Because it is logistically impractical to carry carcasses out from many areas where feral hogs are trapped, carcasses are disposed of on site. Carcasses from feral hogs left near trap sites do not present any additional disease risk as the diseases typically break down quickly in the environment and only remain infectious for a few hours. Leaving them where they are, when in remote areas, is the best way to naturally dispose of the carcass and reduces the chance of spreading disease to new areas.

HOW DO FERAL HOG NUMBERS INCREASE?

Feral hogs are prolific breeders, with one sow able to have two litters per year with an average of six piglets per litter. This is why MDC and partners work to remove every single hog in an area, because leaving just a few individuals can lead to a whole new population in only one year. Whole new populations of feral hogs can occur after one misguided individual releases just a few feral hogs for recreational hunting or hunting for profit. One pregnant sow left behind can establish a new destructive population that will destroy the habitat.

WHAT IS MDC DOING TO ELIMINATE HOGS?

The Missouri Feral Hog Elimination Partnership works on public land and with private landowners to strategically trap feral hogs and eliminate them from the state. The most effective way to eliminate feral hogs is to trap a whole sounder (that's a group) of hogs at a time. Feral hogs are trapped on public ground such as conservation areas, and staff from multiple agencies work with private landowners as well. Partner staff assist landowners with technical advice, on-site visits and setting traps. Landowners are welcome to be involved with the trapping process. In fact, it helps greatly if landowners assist by checking baits and monitoring the trap for captured hogs. However, if a landowner is not able to assist, staff can trap the hogs. All assistance is free to the landowner.

HOW DOES A LANDOWNER GET HELP WITH FERAL HOGS?

Landowners can report feral hog damage and/or request assistance at www.mdc.mo.gov/feralhog or by calling their local USDA or MDC office. They will be directed to local professionals who can help determine the extent of the feral hog damage on their land, provide technical advice, and create a plan to eliminate hogs from their land. After the hogs are removed, the trap will be picked up and moved to another trapping location.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A DOMESTICATED FARM HOG AND A FERAL HOG?

Domestic hogs are contained on a farm, do not cross property boundaries and undergo proper disease testing and vaccinations. Feral hogs are free roaming, unvaccinated hogs that destroy property. Feral hogs in Missouri are a mixture of wild and domestic hogs. They can look dark in color like a wild hog or various colors like a domestic hog. If you see a hog roaming free, where it shouldn't be, call MDC or USDA. They will investigate and determine if it is an escaped domestic or a feral hog and deal with it appropriately.

WHAT CAN PEOPLE DO TO HELP?

Tell others about the dangers of feral hogs and discourage hog hunting, which is detrimental to trapping efforts. Encourage landowners to report sightings, damage or releases of feral hogs at www.mdc.mo.gov/feralhog and seek help from MDC and USDA.